

VZCZCXYZ0000
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHSN #0053 0221609
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 221609Z JAN 08
FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8837
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 000053

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/16/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ES](#)

SUBJECT: PUBLIC SECURITY MINISTER FIGUEROA ON THE ARENA
CONTEST, ELECTION SECURITY, ECONOMIC MISSTEPS

REF: A. SAN SALVADOR 33

[1](#)B. SAN SALVADOR 36

Classified By: The Ambassador, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Public Security Minister Figueroa told the Ambassador January 17 that, given his membership in COENA and in order to avoid any appearance of a conflict of interest, he would not support any candidate during ARENA's internal nomination process. He had cautioned former FM Lainez to avoid suggesting he was a shoo-in for the nomination, warning this could backfire. Figueroa said President Saca was opposed to VP Escobar's candidacy. He said violent groups sympathetic to the FMLN were unlikely to act until after the elections, and only if ARENA won. He lamented recent regulatory decisions that were likely to harm El Salvador's attractiveness to investors. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Minister of Public Security Rene Figueroa told the Ambassador January 17 that he was happy with his decision not to seek ARENA's nomination for President. He said he would not throw his support to any candidate until after ARENA's decision was made in March in order to avoid any conflict of interest, given his membership in COENA (ARENA's executive board). Figueroa said he would encourage every interested candidate to pursue ARENA's nomination in order to ensure the best possible candidate.

[1](#)3. (C) Figueroa said he had cautioned former Foreign Minister Francisco "Pancho" Lainez to avoid giving the impression he was certain to be anointed ARENA's candidate by COENA. By protecting COENA from charges of favoritism, he told Lainez, you protect yourself and your candidacy. Figueroa said he believes VP Ana Vilma de Escobar should be one of the three finalists and that Lainez concurs in that assessment, but that President Saca is opposed to her candidacy, largely due to continuing pique over the snap announcement of her candidacy (without consulting Saca) in September.

[1](#)4. (C) Looking forward, Figueroa said he enjoys government service and would gladly return in a future ARENA administration if the opportunity presented itself. He said he would not be interested in serving as foreign minister, nor as vice president.

[1](#)5. (C) Figueroa said the FMLN had a number of violent splinter groups, but assessed they would not act independently of FMLN leadership. Figueroa said these groups enjoyed popular support in several neighborhoods of San Salvador, including Soyapango and Mejicanos, and had an infrastructure of safe houses in these areas. Figueroa doubted they would take any violent actions before the 2009 elections, judging it more likely they would take action after the elections if ARENA won. He speculated their actions would be indirect, e.g., in the form of hidden explosive devices, rather than more overt acts like shootings.

¶16. (C) On the economy and economic reforms, Figueroa was concerned over recent decisions against Exxon and Shell, as well as recent regulatory decisions to impose rate reductions on electricity distribution companies. He lamented the impact these and other decision would have on El Salvador's investment and business climate (Ref A). Figueroa offered to convoke a meeting with the Presidency's technical secretariat in order to discuss the impact of these moves.

¶17. (C) Comment: We share Figueroa's concerns about recent Administration decisions that reflect negatively on El Salvador's investment climate and may not even be successful in attracting the public support for ARENA that Saca seeks. We will follow up with Figueroa and others in the Saca Administration on economic regulatory issues with the hope of minimizing the long-term damage to El Salvador's economy at the cost of limited and questionable short-term electoral gain. The Ambassador will meet with Technical Secretary (Chief of Staff equivalent) Eduardo Ayala January 23 to discuss the anti-competitive actions of the GOES.

¶18. (C) Comment continued: Figueroa is being wisely cautious in appearing impartial during ARENA's candidate selection process, and will undoubtedly throw his complete support behind ARENA's candidate, regardless of who emerges victorious. We are hopeful that Figueroa's influence will be key to ensuring VP Escobar receives a fair shake within ARENA and does not emerge from the process with bitterness towards her treatment. End comment.
Glazer